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CENTCOM FOR ADMIRAL FALLON FROM AMBASSADOR GRAPPO

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CENTCOM COMMANDER ADMIRAL WILLIAM
[J](#)J. FALLON'S VISIT TO OMAN

REF: MUSCAT 1600

Classified By: AMBASSADOR GARY A. GRAPPO FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

Summary

[J](#)1. (S) Admiral Fallon: Embassy Muscat and I warmly welcome you and your wife to Oman. Sultan Qaboos and your colleagues in the Omani armed forces look forward to meeting you and hearing your perspective on events in the region, especially in Iraq and Iran. As one of our oldest allies in the Middle East, Oman remains a strong friend that has consistently allowed us extensive use of its strategic military bases. Regional threat issues remain a prominent concern for the Omani leadership; however, Oman's perspective on the threat posed by Iran often is different from that of the USG and even its GCC partners. In recent meetings the Omani leadership has been particularly interested in our plans, political and military, regarding Iran. Instability and sectarian violence in Iraq (which Oman fears could spread elsewhere in the region) and the Israel-Palestinian conflict are two other key regional concerns for Oman. Our engagement with the Omani security forces continues to grow and deepen, especially in the area of border security. Oman's military, while small, is a professional, well trained force as evidenced by its ability to host and execute the recent GCC combined/joint exercise involving more than 27,000 people. The U.S.-Oman Joint Military Commission (JMC), held here in March, was very successful. During the JMC both sides had frank discussions concerning regional issues - a dialogue which should continue during your visit. On a personal note, Sultan Qaboos and the military leadership valued establishing strong personal relationships with your predecessors. I am confident they will want to continue this practice during your first visit to Oman. End Summary.

Regional Security Concerns

[J](#)2. (S/NF) While neither the political nor military leadership wants to describe Iran as a threat yet, Omani officials have indicated that they are very concerned with Iran's nuclear ambitions. In one candid conversation, a senior officer remarked that the Omani military could not decide which was the worse option: a strike against Iran's nuclear capability and the resulting turmoil it would cause in the Gulf, or inaction and having to live with a nuclear-capable Iran (and

the probable reaction from Saudi Arabia and Egypt to pursue their own capabilities). Omanis also increasingly fear Iranian meddling and trouble-making in the region, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon, and are worried about the long-term consequences if this behavior is left unchecked. These issues are a primary topic of the Gulf Security Dialogue, which is tentatively scheduled to continue in Washington, D.C. in June.

¶3. (S/NF) Oman retains close, but non-substantive with Iran - which it uses to advocate for cooperation with the West - and is careful not to do anything that might provoke Tehran. Moreover, Omani leaders have a unique view of potential Iranian military action in that they do not believe Iran would attack GCC countries with missiles in response to a military strike staged in the Gulf. Instead, they see asymmetrical, terrorist operations conducted by Iran against Gulf states as more likely. To this end, the Omanis are not keen on acquiring Patriot missiles, and are much more interested in SEW and HIMARS/ATACMS, which they view as the most credible deterrent option.

¶4. (S/NF) The Omani leadership is deeply concerned with Iraq's future and will want to hear your views on the situation there. They are particularly worried that continued violence between Sunni and Shi'a groups in Iraq could easily spill into other Gulf countries. Following the JMC, we received from CENTCOM a Baghdad Security Brief for delivery to the Omani military. Omani government officials have voiced no opposition to a U.S. troop surge as part of the President's new strategy for Iraq, but assert that military force alone will not bring stability to Iraq. Senior Omanis, including the Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs, also doubt whether Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki is
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genuinely interested in, and/or capable of, pursuing reconciliation with Sunni leaders, which they see as critical to ending the insurgency. Omani officials will also be eager to hear your thoughts on Afghanistan/Pakistan, especially as Oman is seeing an increase in illegal smuggling of people (mostly migrant workers) and drugs coming from that region, often with Iranian involvement.

¶5. (SBU) While U.S. military engagement with Oman remains strong, there have been other important developments in the bilateral relationship. The U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement was signed by the President in September 2006; the Agreement will take effect once all regulatory requirements are in place. As Oman drives toward industrialization and economic diversification, several billion dollars of U.S. investment have poured into the country, including from Dow Chemical (petrochemical complex), Bechtel (aluminum smelter) and Occidental Petroleum. Oman has also been a partner in USG reform assistance efforts under the Middle East Partnership Initiative, which focuses on judicial, educational, economic and political reform, as well as women's empowerment. Furthermore, Oman is an active participant in two-port/cargo security programs sponsored by the USG: the Container Security Initiative (administered by the Department of Homeland Security), which pre-screens containerized cargo being shipped to the U.S.; and the Department of Energy's MegaPorts Initiative, which is working to install equipment at Omani ports by this summer to identify nuclear material.

Foreign Policy Context

¶6. (S/NF) Though not a major financial donor, Oman supports USG efforts to promote security and political stability in Iraq. A delegation led by Iraq's Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs visited Muscat in February and Prime Minister Maliki arrived in Muscat on April 25 for talks with the Sultan and senior officials. The Omani government forgave all Iraqi debt and has publicly condemned several high-profile terrorist attacks, while stressing religious tolerance at home. Oman maintains regular political and military ties with Iran, but its strategic relationship lies

with the United States (and the U.K.) and it readily passes messages or items of interest concerning Iran to us. Oman is disturbed by Iran's growing influence in the region - including its trouble-making in Iraq and Lebanon - and by its inability to come to terms with the U.S. and other P5 members over its nuclear program. Nevertheless, the Omani government's perspective on the Iranian threat differs from our own and it strongly seeks to avoid military confrontation with Tehran.

¶17. (S) Oman has used its ties with Tehran to urge the Iranians to adopt a more conciliatory approach in addressing Western concerns over its nuclear activities, including acceptance of last summer's P5 plus 1 proposal. Most recently, Oman's Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs lobbied strongly for the release of the 15 British sailors and marines taken captive by Iran in March. Senior Omani government officials advise us that sanctions against Iran could prove counter-productive and may strengthen hard-line attitudes in Tehran. Oman closed the Israeli Trade Mission in Muscat in 2000 during the Second Intifada, but supports the Roadmap process and still maintains good (though non-public) communications with Israeli officials, including at the Foreign Minister level. You can expect to hear that a lasting Israel-Palestinian peace will greatly enhance our efforts against terrorism in the region.

Domestic Counter-Terrorism (CT) Efforts

¶18. (S) Border control is one of Oman's top priorities. From May-July 06, Omani forces conducted operations to round-up illegal aliens in the country. The combined force, led by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) with the assistance of the Air Force, police and the Sultan's Special Forces was quickly surprised by the scope of the problem. When finished, they had arrested over 7500 persons, the vast majority of whom were economic migrants or workers with expired visas, along with some smugglers. Of interest was the admission by the RAO CDR that they had suspected that al-Qa'ida members would

be arrested, though the operation reportedly did not result in the detention of such persons. Since then, the Royal Oman Police Coast Guard (ROP CG) is reporting an increase in the number of smugglers and illegal migrant workers detained, with some now coming from the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and more Somalis attempting to enter via Yemen. One unofficial estimate placed the number of illegal immigrants apprehended in 2006 at over 25,000. OMC works with the various military and police services to enhance Oman's ability to both monitor and police its borders.

¶19. (S/NF) The Omani security and intelligence services are professional, well-funded and motivated. Oman is not a regional or offshore financial center and, accordingly, does not have a significant money laundering or terrorist financing problem. While there have been no reported incidents of international or domestic terrorism in Oman, there were arrests of an Ibadi extremist group in 2005, which included clerics and members of the military in addition to private citizens. Also in 2005, two Omani citizens accused of participation in extremist activities were repatriated from abroad, one of whom was arrested while attempting to conduct a suicide operation against coalition forces. With its relatively open and welcoming society and increasing numbers of Western tourists, Oman remains vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Recently, Omani security forces have shown a heightened interest in better CT training, and the Sultan's Special Force (SSF) is standing up a 3rd battalion which will have urban CT as its sole mission.

Overall Mil-Mil Programs

¶10. (S/NF) Operations and War Reserve Materials (WRM): Oman has fully supported virtually all access, basing and over-flight requests we have made. NAVCENT flies P-3 patrols from Masirah Island on an irregular single-ship deployment

basis. NAVCENT also uses Al Qarin bombing range when U.S. aircraft carriers transit off the coast. In addition, NAVCENT is looking at increasing the number of port visits it makes to the Sultanate. However, most recently the Omanis quietly turned down a proposed carrier port call. CENTAF's WRM sites at Seeb, Masirah and Thumrait are robust and active. The closure of the military side of Seeb airport will be a phased reduction starting in 2010 and scheduled for completion by 2025. Oman is constructing a new airbase at Al Masanah, close to the port of Sohar and is keen to have U.S. Air Force presence at this base. CENTAF is developing its plans for what WRM will move to Al Masanah and how much contingency infrastructure it would like to have.

¶11. (S) Exercises: Most of this year's exercises were canceled due to the GCC exercise held here. However, during that time we were able to hold smaller, more focused activities such as ARCENT's artillery seminar, and also conducted Counter-IED training as part of Safe Handling exercises. For FY08, initial indications are we will be able to conduct three JCETs as well as two air, two EOD and one ground exercise.

¶12. (U) IMET/CTFP/NESA: FY06 IMET program was USD 1.089M with Oman sending 27 students to the U.S.; five students were sent under the Counter Terrorism Fellowship (CTF) Program. FY07 IMET is USD \$1.089M. Currently, there are 53 Omani NESA alumni with two new participants preparing for travel.

Foreign Military Sales

¶13. (C) FY06 and FY07 FMF is USD 13.86M, a decrease from FY05's USD 19.84M. The FY08 FMF budget request has decreased even further to \$10.10M. OMC is working with MOD to best manage the decrease with its five year acquisition plan. Numerous FMF cases are in process, including NVDs, Naval and Coast Guard boats, M-16 rifles, Javelin and TOW-IIB. After the JMC, MOD is indicating it would like to move HIMARS/ATACM to the top of its priority list. Key FMS cases are:

a. (U) F-16s: Eleven of the 12 aircraft are in country, with the last aircraft (the test plane) now undergoing retrofitting. Overall, the case has been managed very well and the Omanis are proving very capable as pilots,

maintainers and logisticians. Case value is USD 750M.

b. (U) Tropospheric Scatter Network (Troposcatter) and 1kW HF Radios: Omani officials cite these cases when they complain about the slow nature of FMS. These systems will provide integrated national C2; they gained in priority after the Omani operation to roundup illegal immigrants. Company design of system requirements and availability has taken two years. Troposcatter LOA is still pending.

c. (C) Counter Narcotics/Counter Terrorism/Border Security: The Royal Oman Police, parent organization of the ROP Coast Guard, used Article 1004 funding to upgrade the command and control facility at ROP/HQ and to obtain secure HF radios for Coast Guard boats and stations. The radio upgrade was completed Dec 06 and provided the ROP with the ability to intercept more illegal smugglers than by using its old system of cell phones. ROP and OMC are working to obtain additional 1004 and 1033 money to institute further border control and counter narcotic/terrorism programs.

¶14. (S/NF) Bilateral Intelligence Exchanges: Oman and the U.S. have an active intelligence exchange program that is now focused on Iranian military activity. With the demise of the ELINT information sharing program (Cluster Spectrum), due to aging U.S.-provided equipment, Oman is looking to acquire new ELINT/SIGINT equipment to fill the gap.

Your Meetings with Omani Officials

¶15. (C) Omani officials would like to receive an update on

the situations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as current U.S. thinking on Iran. In addition to briefing Omani officials, your visit to Muscat will afford us an important opportunity to gauge the views of senior Omanis, and the Sultan in particular, on Iran and other regional issues. Below are some questions that you may wish to raise during your proposed meeting with the Sultan, as well as with Minister Responsible for Defense Affairs Badr Saud al-Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs Youssef bin Alawi and the COSSAF (LTG Nabahani):

1A. Meeting with Sultan Qaboos bin Said:

-- What are Iran's long-term ambitions and strategy in the region?
-- What threat does Iran pose to Oman and its neighbors?
-- What is your view of the Iranian leadership?
-- What can the region and U.S. do to prevent conflict between Shi'a and Sunni?
-- If Iran were to obtain a nuclear weapon, what would be the reaction of Arab states? Of Oman?
-- In what way, and under what circumstances, could Oman make further contributions to Iraq's security and stability?
-- How do you view the fight against terrorism and extremism as progressing?

1B. Meetings with Defense Minister, Minister Responsible for Foreign Affairs and COSSAF:

-- Congratulations on hosting a successful GCC exercise. Are there any particular lessons learned from it? Can we help?
-- What are your most pressing border security concerns?
-- Do you foresee any instance in which Iran would pose a security threat to Oman?
-- Do you have a strategy or contingency plans to defend against an Iranian military or terrorist action?
-- What kind of threat might Iran, especially if it obtains nuclear weapons capability, pose to other GCC states?
-- What is your view of the Iranian military and political leadership? Who is the most competent? The most political?

116. (U) In conclusion, the overall Oman-U.S. military-to-military relationship is solid. The day to day interaction is candid and constructive with a strong spirit of cooperation on both sides. We look to strengthen this already very sound relationship.
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